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SUBJECT: NOT BETTER THAN CAVES AND RUINS: A SNAPSHOT OF EDUCATION IN BABIL PROVINCE, IRAQ

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¶11. (U) This is a Babil PRT Cable

¶12. (SBU) SUMMARY. During a May 25 meeting, the Education Director General (DG, a provincial representative from the national ministry) for Babil, Dr. Hummadi Al-Awadi, told Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) staff that the current state of education in the province is deplorable and that substantial U.S. assistance is urgently required. The DG complained that while the United States continues to provide small gifts of school supplies and other "minor trinkets," Coalition Forces must engage in large scale construction projects in order to substantially improve the quality of education in the province. PRT staff stressed to the DG that the team and the Regional Embassy Office (REO) have been actively involved in supporting educational endeavors throughout the province, and will continue to do so, but that such ornate projects, including the DG's suggestion to build two great halls, are impractical. END SUMMARY.

¶13. (SBU) PRT staff met with the DG of Education for the purpose of improving cooperation between Coalition Forces and local school districts and to coordinate U.S. military visits to individual schools. The DG stated at the opening of the meeting that while he was highly appreciative of the U.S. military's willingness to provide basic school supplies, including pencils and notebooks, he expressed disappointment that the PRT and Coalition Forces have failed to engage in large scale projects including the construction of school buildings. (COMMENT: Coalition efforts have focused in the past on the reconstruction of damaged schools and not the construction of new schools. USAID has refurbished 165 schools in the province at a cost of \$6.1 million. School supplies provided by Coalition Forces in Babil have been at the initiative of USAID and individual military units and not organized by the PRT or other Coalition Forces. END COMMENT).

¶14. (SBU) The DG further explicated that Coalition partners previously implemented small scale donation campaigns, similar to current U.S. efforts, with little success. One of the DG's aides who attended the meeting took a harsher tone and related that such previous projects were a considerable "waste of time and money". The DG added a public diplomacy aspect to the conversation, contending that terrorists are exploiting the widely perceived notion that Coalition Forces only provide symbolic assistance. Mimicking a terrorist, the DG mocked, "What? Those Americans provide you with only paper and pencils [and not with substantial reconstruction programs]?" These types of charges, he continued, "will convince the common person" that the United States is unenthusiastic about helping

the people of Babil.

15. (SBU) The DG further declared that all levels of education, including primary, secondary and tertiary, in Babil are facing an impending crisis due to a lack of space, supplies and faculty training. One aide added that the educational facilities in Babil are "not better than caves and ruins" and that he hoped Coalition Forces would help to redress this problem, as "brothers in humanity." At the conclusion of the meeting, a second aide stated that Babil requires 400 new schools (there are approximately 300 students per school), comprehensive teacher training and technical expertise to create new syllabi. The aide also requested that the PRT Deputy Leader ask the U.S. military to provide security for students and teachers during upcoming examinations in June.

16. (SBU) REO and PRT staff had previously met with officials from Babil University. The administrators of the university echoed a similar theme, arguing that the United States has a moral obligation to rebuild the educational infrastructure of the institute. Without direct U.S. aid, these administrators declared, they would remain unable to develop their university.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Babil, in relationship to the rest of South-Central Iraq, possesses a well educated population, marked with higher than average literacy rates and a relatively dedicated educational staff. While the state of education in Babil may not be in such dire straits as portrayed by the DG of Education, there is no doubt that there is much room for improvement. Unfortunately, it is the experience of PRT staff that most public officials, including educators, make unrealistic demands that Coalition Forces are simply unable to meet. Moreover, when officials resort to the tactic of casting a wide net to see what they can get, it makes it difficult for the PRT to accurately judge what the real needs are. For example, the DG of Education failed to mention that the Ministry of Education is currently building 48 new schools this year at a cost of \$7 million. Nor did he mention that Coalition Forces have earmarked \$22 million for Babil University from Iraqi

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development funds during the previous fiscal year. END COMMENT.
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